

## **THE LONDON LEAD COMPANY- WAS IT A QUAKER COMPANY?**

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### **THE QUAKERS**

George Fox founder and religious leader of the Society of Friends, began preaching in about 1650, he had been imprisoned at Derby on a charge of blasphemy, and it is whilst in front of the magistrates that it is said that he told them to *“tremble before the Word of the Lord”*, whereupon one of the magistrates became the first person to call the society members “Quakers”. This was used initially as a term of abuse but became accepted as a name for the members of the Society of Friends.

Quakers believe that *‘there is that of God in everyone’* and *‘everyone is known by God and can know God in a direct relationship.’*<sup>1</sup>

They don't have a fixed system of religious belief because they understand that the search for truth can lead to new expressions of values as well as confirming existing ones. They call these values 'testimonies'. These testimonies are to equality, peace, truth/integrity, justice and simplicity, and how they relate to one another.<sup>2</sup>

Quakers became known for integrity both in personal relations and in business affairs; they maintained fixed prices for goods, rather than using bargaining methods, and honoured contracts.<sup>3</sup> As a 'Society of Friends' they developed a first-class network of contacts and business intelligence from all parts of the country. This meant access to financial and technical help, trading contacts and introductions, transferable credit worthiness and reliable information about the state of distant markets and opportunities. Clarks of Street were saved on three occasions in the early nineteenth century—by a trusting bank on one occasion and twice, in 1844 and 1863, by relatives.<sup>4</sup>

### **THE GOVERNOR AND COMPANY FOR THE SMELTING DOWN LEAD WITH PIT COAL AND SEA COAL.**

The company was granted its charter by William and Mary on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1692. It was formed initially as a smelting company; the Company Minute book shows that the first meeting took place on Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup> October 1692, when Richard Owen was sworn in as the first Governor as dictated by the Charter. On the following day (Friday the 14<sup>th</sup> October) the other members of the Court were sworn in. The Company encountered many difficulties and as a result of which it proved to be unsuccessful and it closed down on Monday the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1695. At the Rummer Tavern, Charing Cross on Monday the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1696 the last meeting was held at which the Company's finances were finalised and the books, papers, Charter and seals were to be delivered to Mr Renda.

### **A NEW START**

Edward Wright and a group of Friends (Society of Friends - Quaker's) had carried out experiments in the smelting of lead and construction of furnaces, but before they could set up in business they had first to acquire the Charter of the Governor and Company. They could achieve this by becoming members of the Company. The difficulty they had, was, that the conditions of the Charter demanded that each member had to swear an oath of allegiance.

The Affirmation Act of 1696 enabled Quakers to affirm rather than swear an oath, so the company sought legal advice regarding Quakers being admitted by making an affirmation instead.

On February the 10<sup>th</sup> 1704/5, a Court meeting of the Governor and Company was called by the Deputy Governor Thomas Addison.

*“Mr Thomas Renda acquainted the Court that neither Sir Talbot Clerke or any others for him have ever since the last Court thought fit to take on them the Patent and pay the £110 8s as ordered by the said Court, and that severall Gentlemen have proposed to pay two shillings per share to each person that shall think fit to transfer them. And severall Adventurers in the joint Stock having already done it, & others inclining to do the same, he desires the opinion & resolution of the court therein.*

*“Whereupon this Court is of opinion that every member hath a liberty to dispose of & transfer his own shares at what price and to whom they please.*

*“This court next under their consideration the Oath usually taken by each person on their admittance into this company, and for the ease & satisfaction of such as may hereafter be admitted He is hereby unanimously agreed to and.*

*“Ordered. That the oath to be taken by all members admitted into the Joynt Stock of this Corporation or that shall be elected Governor, Deputy Governor or Assistant besides the Oaths to the Government shall (instead of the former oath of fidelity to the company) be in the words or to the effect following, Viz<sup>t</sup>.*

*“I. A.B. do sincerely promise & swear That I will be faithful to the Governor & Company for Smelting down Lead with Pit coal & Sea coal during my continuance in the Joynt Stock of the said Company.”<sup>5</sup>*

Their first business was to admit as members of the Company and then elect to the Court seven Non-Friends, who could take the oath; Samuel Davies was elected Governor, Urban Hall Esq., Peter de Lannoy Esq., Mr. Richard Matthews, Mr. Enoch Floyd, Mr. Thomas Kirby, and Mr. John Clark were elected as the Court of Assistants.

Thomas Addison, Sir Henry Marwood, Thomas Renda, Capt. Thomas Nix, John Henly, Sir Talbot Clerk, Richard Adams, George Moore, and Matthias Cupper sold their shares, so forfeiting all offices in the Company.

At the next meeting, three days later, Davies informed the Court that, Sir Symon Harcourt (Solicitor General) agrees that the affirmation of a Quaker is admissible in place of the oaths for entry into the Company. Then Edward Wright, Cornelius Mason, John Haddon, Jacob Franklin, and Thomas Cooper took the affirmation in lieu of oaths and were admitted to the Company. They then proceeded to elect a Deputy Governor, Enoch Floyd and five assistants; Dr Edward Wright, Cornelius Mason, John Haddon, Jacob Franklin, and Thomas Cooper.

*THE AFFIRMATION taken by the Members of the Corporation of the Governor and Company for the Smelting down Lead &c. appointed by their Charter.*

*I. A. B. do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare, that I will be true and faithful to King GEORGE; and do solemnly, sincerely, and truly profess, testify, and declare, that I do from my heart abhor, detest, and renounce, as impious and heretical, that wicked Doctrine and Position, That Princes excommunicated or*

*deprived by the POPE, or any Authority of the See of Rome, may be deposed or murdered by their Subjects, or any other whatsoever.*

*AND I do declare that no foreign Prince, Person, Prelate, State or Potentate, hath, or ought to have, any Power, Jurisdiction, Superiority, Preeminence, or Authority, Ecclesiastical or Spiritual within this Realm. And further I do solemnly declare, that I will be true and faithful to the Governor and Company for the smelting down Lead with Pit-Coal and Sea-Coal, during my continuance in the said Joint-Stock.*<sup>6</sup>

The Quakers were already members of the Ryton Company (Ryton smelt mill) which was closely associated with the company of Royal Mines Copper. These two companies were incorporated into the London Lead Company, The Royal Mines Copper on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1704/5 and the Ryton Company on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 1705.

This company being based in London became known as the 'London Lead Company,' and by some 'The Quaker Company'. The records of the Blackett Lead Company frequently refer to the 'Quaker Company, for example in a letter written to Isaac Hunter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1764, "...I find the Quaker Co have already got some of their lead from Joblings yard. ..."<sup>7</sup>

It is understandable that the company would have been called the 'Quaker Company', as a number of its founders had belonged to the Society of Friends, what is questionable is whether it really was a Quaker Company that is to say a company owned and run by Quakers. In order to examine this, we need to look at who the shareholders were, the members of the Court, and the way the company conducted its affairs.

It is useful to take a brief look at some of those businesses that were without question owned and run by Quakers for the sake of comparison.

- Cadbury, Started by John Cadbury in 1824, as a family business remaining under Cadbury family control until 1969.
- Rowntree started 1862 by Henry Isaac Rowntree, joined by his brother Joseph in 1869. Became a public liability company in 1897.
- Darby Ironworks, started by Abraham Darby, in 1709 produced Iron at Coalbrookdale, a family company.
- Huntsman Steel, Benjamin Huntsman set up as a steel maker in Sheffield in 1751, he and his son developed a thriving business.
- Clark's founded in 1825 by brothers Cyrus and James Clark, a family company.
- Reckitts, Isaac Reckitt in 1840 he took over a small starch-making factory in Hull and founded Reckitt & Sons. In 1862 Isaac Reckitt died. The firm was left equally to three of his sons, George, Francis, and James. Then, in 1879, the business became a limited company; it was now called Reckitt & Sons Ltd.
- Carr's Biscuits founded in 1831 by Jonathan Dodgson Carr in Carlisle remained in family to 1931.
- Barclays Bank, traces its origins back to 1690 when John Freame, and Thomas Gould (both Quakers) started trading as goldsmith bankers in Lombard Street, London. The name "Barclays" became associated with the business in 1736, when Freame's son-in-law James Barclay became a partner. In 1896 several banks notably Backhouse's Bank of Darlington and Gurney's Bank of Norwich (both of

which also had their roots in Quaker families), united under the banner of Barclays and Co., a joint-stock bank.

These companies all have a common factor in that they were owned and run by Quakers. The London Lead Company from its very beginning was a Joint Stock Company, (as is clearly stated in the last paragraph of the Affirmation) therefore owned by shareholders who elected the Court of Assistants.

All members of the London Lead Company were either required to take an oath, in open Court, or in the case of a Quaker, who for religious reasons could not take an oath, an affirmation. These are recorded in the minutes of the Court; therefore, it is possible to differentiate between members who were Quakers and those who were not. Unfortunately, the minutes of the Court only give the names of the shareholders up to 1729. Another problem was that in 1792 changes were made to the rules regarding the taking of oaths and affirmations. The minutes of 27<sup>th</sup> September 1792<sup>8</sup> reported:

*“The Governor acquainted the General Court that an amendment to the Charter had been obtained.*

*1. To dispense with the usual oaths on the first admission of any person by purchase or otherwise, but such admission doth not entitle such person to vote in General Courts or otherwise.*

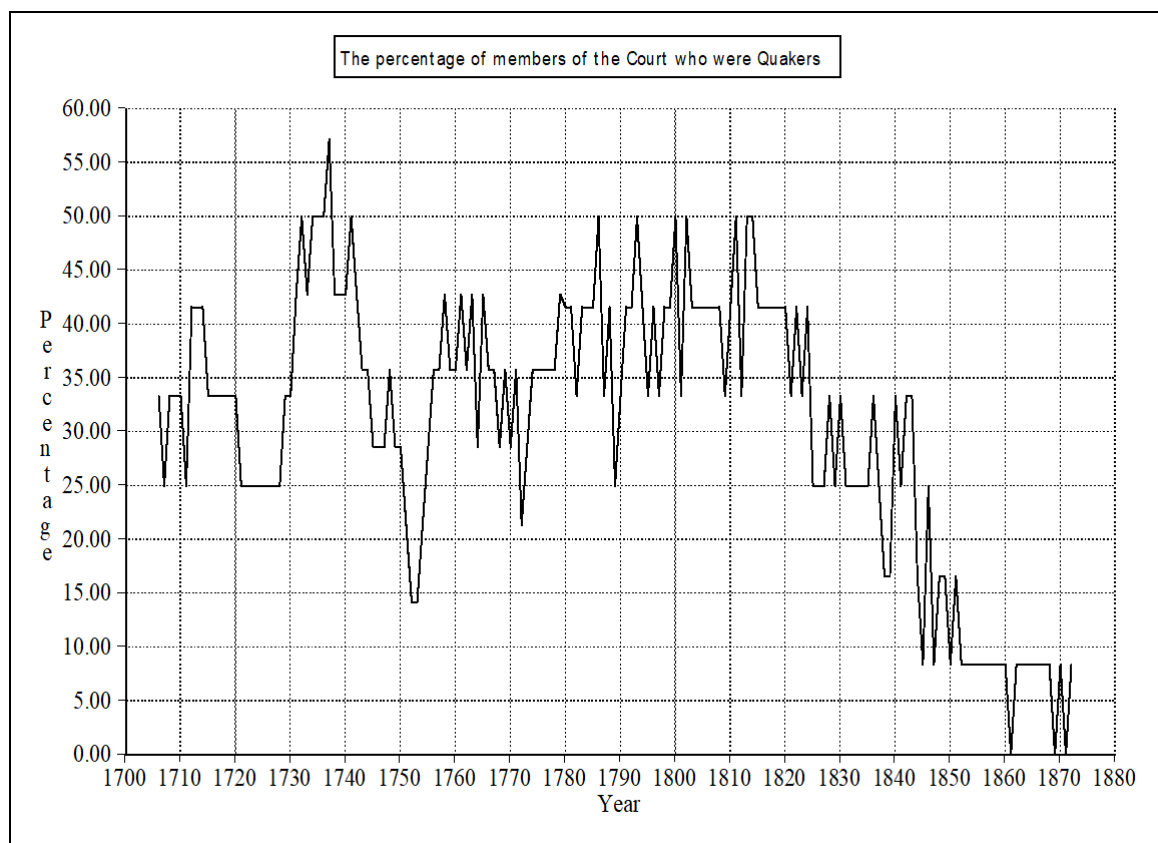
*2. No person born out of the King’s allegiance can become a proprietor of any share or shares.”*

This means that from this date it cannot be determined how many Quakers were shareholders, but members of the Court being voting members still took oaths or affirmations, so it is possible to determine the make-up of the Court up until 1867. In November of 1867, a change in the Parliamentary Act relating to oaths was passed which enabled the company to do away with the need to take oaths, in its place a declaration was made. So, from this time monitoring the number of Court members who were Quakers, is not possible; fortunately, up until 1872 the membership of the Court did not change, so that a record exists of those who had taken oaths or affirmations in the past.

In 1706, 68% of the shareholders were Quakers holding 70% of the shares, in 1707 this fell to 61% of shareholders were Quakers holding 64.8% of the shares. This decline continued and by 1720 only 40.5% of the shareholders were Quakers but they did hold 55.4% of the shares. This majority shareholding was not to last, in 1725 only 26.3% of shareholders were Quakers holding 41.1% of the shares. 1729 is the last year that it is possible to use this data by which time 23.8% of the shareholders were Quakers who held 34.7% of the shares. On this basis it does not seem appropriate to call it a ‘Quaker Company’.

In the early years a number of the senior agents belonged to the Society of Friends. Charles Alsopp was the steward at the Ryton Cupola, when the Ryton Company was amalgamated with the London Lead Company; he became their Northern agent, when the Ryton works were taken over by the Blakett Company. In around 1725, he was replaced by Abraham Watson also a Quaker. The Northern agent who replaced Abraham Watson in 1742, was Thomas Westgarth, whose son William (both Quakers) worked for the company until 1763, when he left to work for the Blakett company at Coalcleugh. When Thomas Westgarth died in 1748 he was replaced by John Smith

who was also a Quaker, who on his death in 1759 was replaced by Thomas Tweeddale the first agent not to be a Quaker (He is recorded as having taken the oaths). It follows therefore that the company would during this period have been strongly influenced by the philosophy of the Society of Friends. During the period when Robert Stagg Jnr. was the Chief agent of the company a great number of improvements were carried out, for this reason it has been thought by some that he was a member of the Society of Friends. This idea is not supported by the evidence. Arthur Raistrick in his books never suggested that Robert Stagg was a Quaker, and when we look through the Stagg family records we find that Robert Stagg was baptised and married in an Anglican church, and his family baptised in Anglican churches; Robert Stagg was buried at St Columba, Topcliffe in 1864.



The graph showing the percentage of Court members, who were Quakers, gives a good indication of the strength of influence of the Quakers on the company over the years. It was after all the Court who determined the activities of the company, not the agents. Being a Quaker was no guarantee of a job as Peter Hodgson the superintendent of the company's White Lead works (and shareholder) found out, he was appointed in 1754, but sacked in 1757, as the court were not happy with his work.<sup>9</sup>

In the period between 1706 and 1872 there were only eleven occasions when there were an equal number of Quaker and non-Quaker members in the Court and only one occasion, 1737 when they held a majority vote. It was not until 1734 that the first Quaker was appointed as Governor to the Court, this was John Freame, he remained Governor until 1742. In the history of the company there were only four Governors who were Quakers. Thomas Hyam 1753 - 1763, Jacob Hagen 1812 - 1817, Thomas

How Masterman 1823 - 1824. The graph shows that from the point of view of the Court, by the late 1820's the influence of the Quaker members was quite limited.

Despite being noted for their integrity etc., in business not everything was perfect as the following Court minutes for 12th June 1739 minutes show:<sup>10</sup>

*"The secretary reported that on the 28th and 30th days of May last past and the first day of this instant June the cause depending in the Court of Chancery between this Company and John Hall and Joseph Hall Executors of Urban Hall Deceased (formerly governor) George Pick Executor of Enoch Floyd Deceased (Deputy Governor) John Gray Executor of Edward Wright Deceased (Assistant and Treasurer) John Tatnall & Edward Leeds Junior Executors of Edward Leeds Senior Deceased (Assistant) Arthur Woolley (Assistant) Sarah Hopkins Executrix of John Haddon & Bery Hopkins both Deceased (Assistants) William Smith (Assistant) Matthew Beachcroft & Robert Beachcroft Executors of Samuel Beachcroft Deceased (Assistant) James Creed & Edward Leeds Junior (Assistants) and James Allen Executor of John Toms Deceased (Assistant of this Company) was heard before the Lord Chancellor and on the last of those days a Decree was pronounced in favour of this Company. The minutes where of as entered in the Registers Book are as follows:*

*Friday the 1st Day of June 1739*

*Lead Company against Beachcroft and others.*

*Lord Chancellor*

*"Declare that the allowance of the sum of £12,017 10s made by the Court of Assistants on the 25th July 1721 to Doctor Wright the then Treasurer of the Company on account of South Sea Stock & South Sea Subscriptions pretended to have been bought in the months of August, September and October 1720 and of the payments on such Subscriptions and also the allowance of the sum of £1,531 made by the said Court on the 27th March 1722 on account of the difference arising on a contract for £2,000 London Assurance Stock pretended to have been made with Joseph Willie in August 1720 were unwarrantable and wrongfully made by the said Court of Assistants. And that the said two sums of £12,017 10s & £1,531 were fraudulently charged on the Plaintiffs the Company in breach of the Duty of trust reposed in the said Court of Assistants and Treasurer.*

*And that the Defendant Gray the Executor of the said Doctor Wright & such of the Governor, Deputy Governor & Assistants as were present at the said respective Courts of Assistants and did not dissent from the orders for making such allowances ought to make satisfaction for the same to the Plaintiffs the Company. ..."*

## **PHILANTHROPY**

The London Lead Company were well known for their philanthropic attitude toward their workmen and the community in general. Was this attitude unusual and if so was such behaviour due to the influence of the Society of Friends? In order to determine this, it is necessary to look at the behaviour of the other mining companies. The Blakett/Beaumont Company was the other large concern in the north, so a comparison between the two companies would shed light on this.

In the case of religion both companies did a great deal, the London Lead Company giving land and money towards the building of churches and chapels, as well as

supporting the clergy. The Blakett company did the same, Allenheads Chapel probably dating back to 1670, was rebuilt in 1701, Sir William Blakett supplying the materials and providing a house for the minister, this chapel being rebuilt in stone in 1826.<sup>11</sup> Coalcleugh chapel was built in 1704, and Carrshield chapel in 1822. Originally the miners contributed half a day's pay each month, to the up keep of the minister at Allenheads (who also served Coalcleugh); but in 1795 Colonel Beaumont took over this responsibility, offering the minister £40 in lieu of the money paid by the miners and £20 for teaching in the school.<sup>12</sup> Both companies were very supportive of education, both building schools, reading rooms, and giving annually to the cost of running them.

With regard to wages it is difficult to compare the two companies as they had slightly different methods of organisation. The Blakett Company preferred to pay the majority of the pay at the annual or half annual pays, whereas the London Lead Company, especially in the later years tried to keep the subsistence money, very close to the men's wages. An interesting insight to the Company attitude to the setting of the miners wages is given in a letter dated 11 November 1816 to the Court from Robert Staggs:

*"Taking advantage of the depressed state of the Lead Trade, We have been enabled thereby to reduce the wages to a degree which would have been utterly impossible under more prosperous circumstances, and it will be my care to prevent an undue increase in better times; the workmen have also been forced into a very sensible improvement of their moral habits; Drunkenness (the Miners' prevailing Sin) is comparatively abolished amongst them and those lavish & extravagant habits, induced by their former high wages are in a great degree corrected".*

In 1795 both the London Lead Company and Blakett/Beaumont company paid subsistence payments of 10s 6d per month, in 1812 both 30s per month, in 1816 Blakett/Beaumont company temporarily dropped theirs to 20s, but the Lead Company's rose to 40s per month. In 1820 the Lead Company was paying 40s per month and the Blakett/Beaumont Company 30s, by 1846 they were both paying 40s, but whereas the Lead Company's had increased to 54s by 1872, as recorded in the minutes;

*"... the Governor inform Mr. Bainbridge that the Court agree to the Subsistence money being fixed at the rate of 54/- per month subject to whatever precautions may be found necessary to protect the Company from loss through over advances."*<sup>13</sup>

In 1872 the Blakett/Beaumont Company was still giving 40s,<sup>14</sup> this lower rate of Lent money paid by the Blakett/Beaumont Company was due to Thomas Sopwith's belief that it was better that the miners avoided getting into debt to the company, as well as potentially giving them more money at the pays.

This is not necessarily a fair comparison, the Beaumont Company had the percent system which helped to pay off miners arrears, in 1872 the arrears at this date were £421 5s 7d. of which £293 10s 8d were arrears which were not recoverable, towards these arrears the men contributed £11 15s 6d, all but £7 12s 5d was written off by the company.<sup>15</sup>

The mine owners felt that the system benefited the workmen, as it prevented them having too much money in their hands at one time and therefore prevented them squandering the money, also it could act as a savings scheme. In the 1864 report<sup>16</sup> Robert Bainbridge stated that he thought it beneficial that they should be paid annually

because, "It comes to meet those annually accruing charges which they cannot escape, and our retaining the money in our own hands I believe is better than if they had it in their pockets, in many cases." He also said that the men used the extra money on buying cows, and in building cottages.

As well as wages in times of hardship both companies supplied their men with cheap corn (mostly Barley, Rye, or Rice). The Blackett/Beaumont Company, account books show payments being made for corn that was supplied to their workmen as early as 1724, the cash books show 120 bushels of barley being bought.<sup>17</sup> Corn was supplied on a regular basis; for example, in 1736 corn to the value of £100 was sent to the miners, 80 Bushels of Rye were sent to the Weardale miners in September of 1740, £100 of corn was sent to the lead mines in 1741. Supplies were also sent in 1795.<sup>18</sup> The earliest record of this being done by the London Lead Company was in 1729, the minutes of 6<sup>th</sup> May 1729 recording:

*"Whereas our Chief Agent in Flintshire Thomas Barker hath in several of his letters lately represented to us the scarcity of Corn and the hardships the poor miners, smelters and others were under by the advanced price thereof and that if they were not speedily supplied he should be obliged to raise their wages to allay their great complaints and keep them quiet being at the same time sensible how difficult it will be for us to reduce their advanced wages hereafter, to prevent which inconveniences we think it is for the interest of the Company and will rebound much to their reputation to send them a supply of Corn from hence being much cheaper than at their market.*

*"Therefore, we desire the treasurer that he will give orders for the hiring of a vessel about 60 Tons and for the buying of about 400 Quarters of Corn viz. 280 Quarters of Barley, 80 Quarters of Wheat, and 80 Quarters of Oats, for the relief of the miners, smelters and others who are employed in our several works there."*<sup>19</sup>

The Lead company do not record further help for their miners until 1800, when the company minutes record concern, and they sent £50 to Thomas Dodd for the relief of their workmen, later in the year they arranged for a Corn mill to be erected for the use of their workmen, and sent 8 casks of rice.<sup>20</sup> The company continued to help their men in times of need. As it can be seen both companies helped their men, in both cases this was not just out of a sense of kindness but also good commercial sense, it was cheaper to supply corn than increase wages.

Both companies provided medical help to their workmen, the Lead Company in 1827, and the Beaumont Company in 1846/7, and both helped in setting up and maintaining Benefit Societies for their men.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is fair to say that both companies showed a philanthropic attitude towards their work force, what one did, the other would also usually do, deciding which company led the way is difficult as both, at different times did so. It was not only these two companies that helped their workmen, Greenwich Hospital, the Hudgill Burn company, and Rodderup Fell company, funded both education and religion.

In the early years, of the formation of the new company, it would be fair to say that its Quaker members heavily influenced its activities but by the 1740's this influence declined. The make-up of the Court supports this view, it would also be possible to go through the major innovations of the company, the building of Nenthead village in



the 1750's, the expansion of Nenthead in 1825, and the new church built in 1845, to name a few and note that these were times when the number of Quakers in the Court were low. This suggests that these decisions were made without the need for pressure from the Quakers. From this it can be concluded that to continue to call it a 'Quaker Company', is inappropriate.

**David McAnelly**  
**27<sup>th</sup> August 2000**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fgcquaker.org/discover/faqs-about-quakers#believe?>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.quaker.org.uk/about-quakers/our-values>

<sup>3</sup> "Quakers in Brief" or "Quakerism made Easy" David M Murray-Rust, Birkenhead Meeting, 1995

<sup>4</sup> John Punshon, 'The English Quaker Firm', Quaker Studies: Volume 22, Issue 2, Liverpool University Press, December 2017

<sup>5</sup> London Lead Company Court minutes. NEIMME. LLC 1

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Letter book of the Blackett/Beaumont Lead Company. Northumberland Record Office. NRO 672/E/1E/3.

<sup>8</sup> London Lead Company Court minutes. NEIMME. LLC 14

<sup>9</sup> London Lead Company Court minutes. NEIMME. LLC 11.

<sup>10</sup> London Lead Company Court minutes. NEIMME. LLC 9

<sup>11</sup> A History of Northumberland Volume 3 Hexhamshire part 1. A. B. Hinds 1896.

<sup>12</sup> Letter book of the Blackett/Beaumont Lead Company. Northumberland Record Office. NRO 672/E/1E/5.

<sup>13</sup> London Lead Company Court minutes 14<sup>th</sup> May 1872. NEIMME. LLC 32

<sup>14</sup> The Lead Miners of the Northern Pennines in the eighteenth & nineteenth centuries. (pg. 69) C J Hunt 1984

<sup>15</sup> Allendale Arrears Book. Northumberland Record Office. NRO 2762/A/122.

<sup>16</sup> Kinnaird Report. Epitome of Evidence published 1864

<sup>17</sup> Cash Book of the Blackett/Beaumont Lead Company 9<sup>th</sup> April 1724. Northumberland Record Office. NRO 672/E/1a/1.

<sup>18</sup> Cash Books of the Blackett/Beaumont Lead Company. Northumberland Record Office NRO 672/E/1A/1 and NRO 672/C/32B

<sup>19</sup> London Lead Company Court minutes. NEIMME. LLC 6.

<sup>20</sup> London Lead Company Court minutes. NEIMME. LLC 15.

NEIMME - North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers.

NRO - Northumberland County Record Office.